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Executive Summary

The **Design Review Guidelines** intend to remove the mystery from the design review process by providing some measure of predictability for property owners to ensure that Architectural Review Board decisions are objective and consistent for building and sign projects in the **Architectural Preservation Districts** and **Corridor Protection Districts**. In these **Design Review Guidelines**, the Architectural Review Board has transcribed the design review and community preservation goals which have evolved over time into a clear, concise, and usable format.

The 1989 Comprehensive Plan and the 1991 Zoning Ordinance recommended the creation of an Architectural Review Board and **Design Review Guidelines** for the Architectural Review Board. The nature of the guidelines follows the Architectural Review Article of the 1991 Zoning Ordinance and subsequent amendments to enhance the quality of life for all by preserving the city's character and desirable aesthetic features, ensuring that new development is compatible. The special character-defining features of the city were identified schematically in the Comprehensive Plan and specifically in 1992 with an architectural survey report. The 2013 Comprehensive Plan recommended that the inventory and assessment be updated to include 50 years old or older buildings since the last survey in 1992. The 2021 update has listed all buildings by neighborhood and whether those buildings are contributing or non-contributing to the neighborhood.

Buildings and neighborhoods listed on or eligible for the **National Register of Historic Places** and other contributing

and non-contributing buildings are designated by neighborhood in Chapter 4. These neighborhood lists contain buildings from the 1992 survey performed by Frazier and Associates and recent staff updates identifying contributing and non-contributing buildings in the city. Based on National Register criteria Frazier and Associates recommended potential individual buildings and neighborhoods that would qualify as historic districts on the National Register of Historic Places. The purpose of the inventory of buildings and neighborhoods listed on or eligible for the **National Register of Historic Places** is not to mandate preservation and protection of the listed property but to alert the Architectural Review Board to the fact that the property has some significance in defining the city's character in representing architectural styles and cultural periods from the city's past, and, in particular, that the property contributes to the character of the neighborhood and surrounding area. When the Architectural Review Board reviews development proposals for the site of a listed property or property in the vicinity of a listed property, the Architectural Review Board considers the character of the property, the role it plays in the surrounding area, and the value of preservation of the resource. It weighs it against the current state of the property and the surrounding area and the proposal for alteration or redevelopment of the site. If the property in its current state has lost much of the integrity which made it significant or contributory, and if the proposed new development would improve the character of the surrounding area, the Architectural Review Board may decide that alteration or redevelopment of the site is appropriate and perhaps preferable to retaining the building in its present state or a restored state. Another purpose of the Listing is to alert the Architectural Review Board that when it determines that a

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listed property cannot be retained in the face of present development patterns, it should be documented before removal or dramatic alteration.

As recommended by the Comprehensive Plan, the guidelines are compatible with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings and follow the precedent set by the State and other communities which use the Secretary's Standards as the basis for their preservation programs and local design review guidelines.

History of Design Review in the County, Virginia, and Williamsburg

The first comprehensive preservation ordinance in the Country was enacted by Charleston, South Carolina, in 1931. On the federal level, Congress passed the Historic Sites Act in 1935, advocating historic preservation as a national policy for federal agencies. The current national preservation program was enacted into law as the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, with subsequent amendments. The first preservation law in Virginia was enacted by the City of Alexandria in 1946. Virginia State enabling legislation for historic preservation was enacted in 1950, with subsequent amendments.

The City of Williamsburg first adopted a preservation ordinance in 1947 when the Colonial Williamsburg Historic Area was adopted as an overlay zoning district, requiring all reconstruction projects and land uses to be reviewed by the

Board of Zoning Appeals on a case-by-case basis. In 1958, the city adopted a comprehensive architectural review ordinance for the entire city, establishing Williamsburg's first architectural review board, the Board of Architectural Consultants. The 1991 Zoning Ordinance was amended to reflect State Code requirements for architectural review. A comprehensive set of design guidelines were adopted with Architectural Review Districts and Corridor Protection District to bring the city into compliance with State regulations for architectural preservation and review.

According to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, by 1957, approximately 11 communities in the Country had enacted preservation ordinances. With ordinances dating from 1947 and 1958, the City of Williamsburg was among the first three localities in Virginia, with Alexandria and Richmond, and one of the earliest communities in the country to adopt a comprehensive architectural review ordinance to promote historical preservation and general welfare.

There are over 70 architectural review boards and hundreds of buildings and sites on the Virginia Landmarks Register (VLR) and National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) districts in Virginia. The perception that location in architectural review districts decreases property values, espoused by some property owners, is refuted by the experience of Alexandria, Fredericksburg, and Richmond. Historic districts around Virginia attract tourism, property owners, and reinvestment tax income to the host community. When a community becomes a more attractive place to visit, live and conduct business, the value of the real property rises, and the quality of life is enhanced.

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Designating architectural review districts ensures that the community's special character is preserved and enhanced. The City of Williamsburg supports the efforts of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation to create and maintain an ideal environment for the Historic Area and reinforces a commitment to attract and retain visitors, residents, and businesses.

Approval of New Materials

The Architectural Review Board will continue to review new materials regularly and may approve them for use on a case-by-case basis. New materials may be presented to the Board during any regular meeting and should include a sample of the material and the manufacturer's specifications for the material. If the Board determines the **Design Review Guidelines** should be amended to include the new material, the Board may initiate an amendment to the Guidelines in accord with Article IX, Architectural Review, Sec. 21-853(h), of the Zoning Ordinance.